Tamil Arasu

SEPTEMBER 1979 50 P.

PERIYAR
CENTENARY
CELEBRATIONS
SPECIAL
NUMBER

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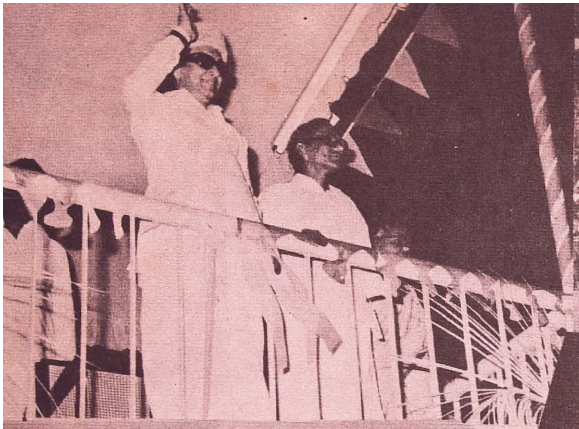

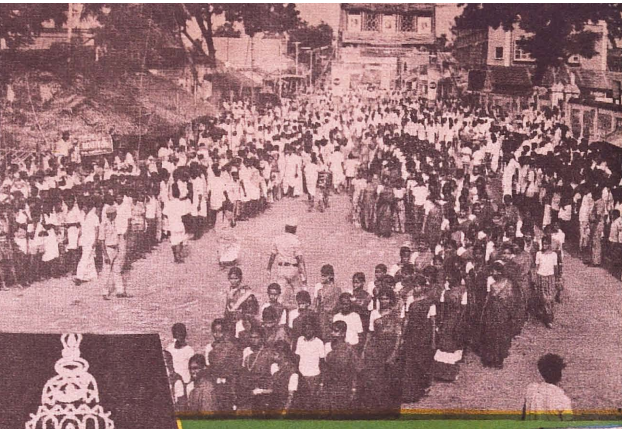

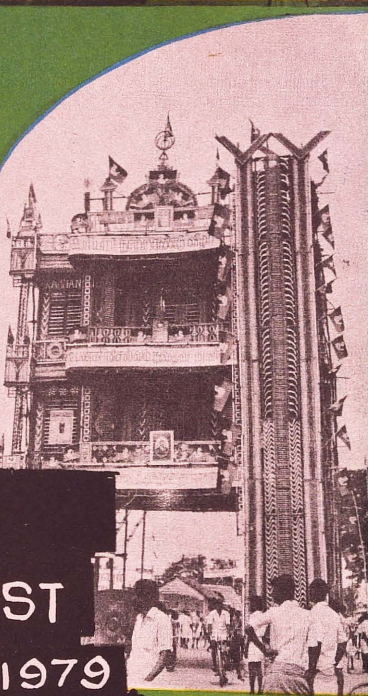

THANTHAI PERIYAR

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

THIRUVARUR

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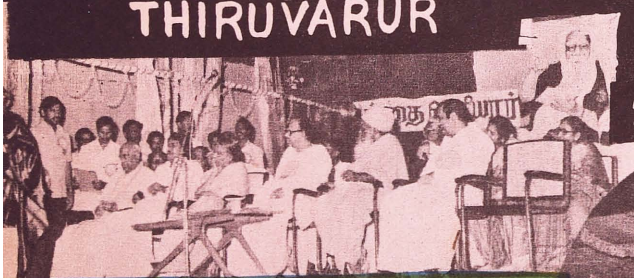

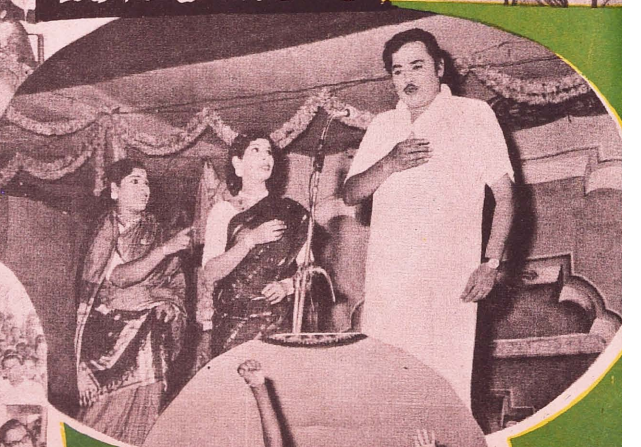

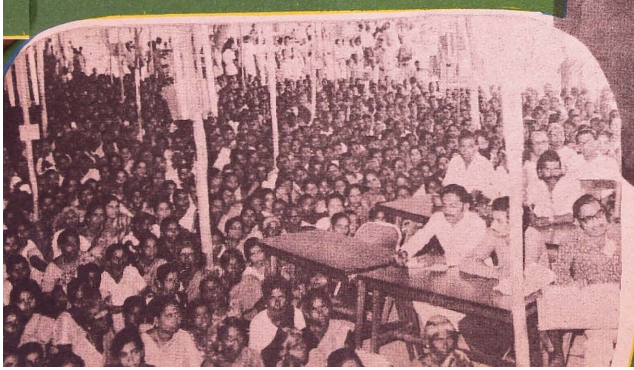

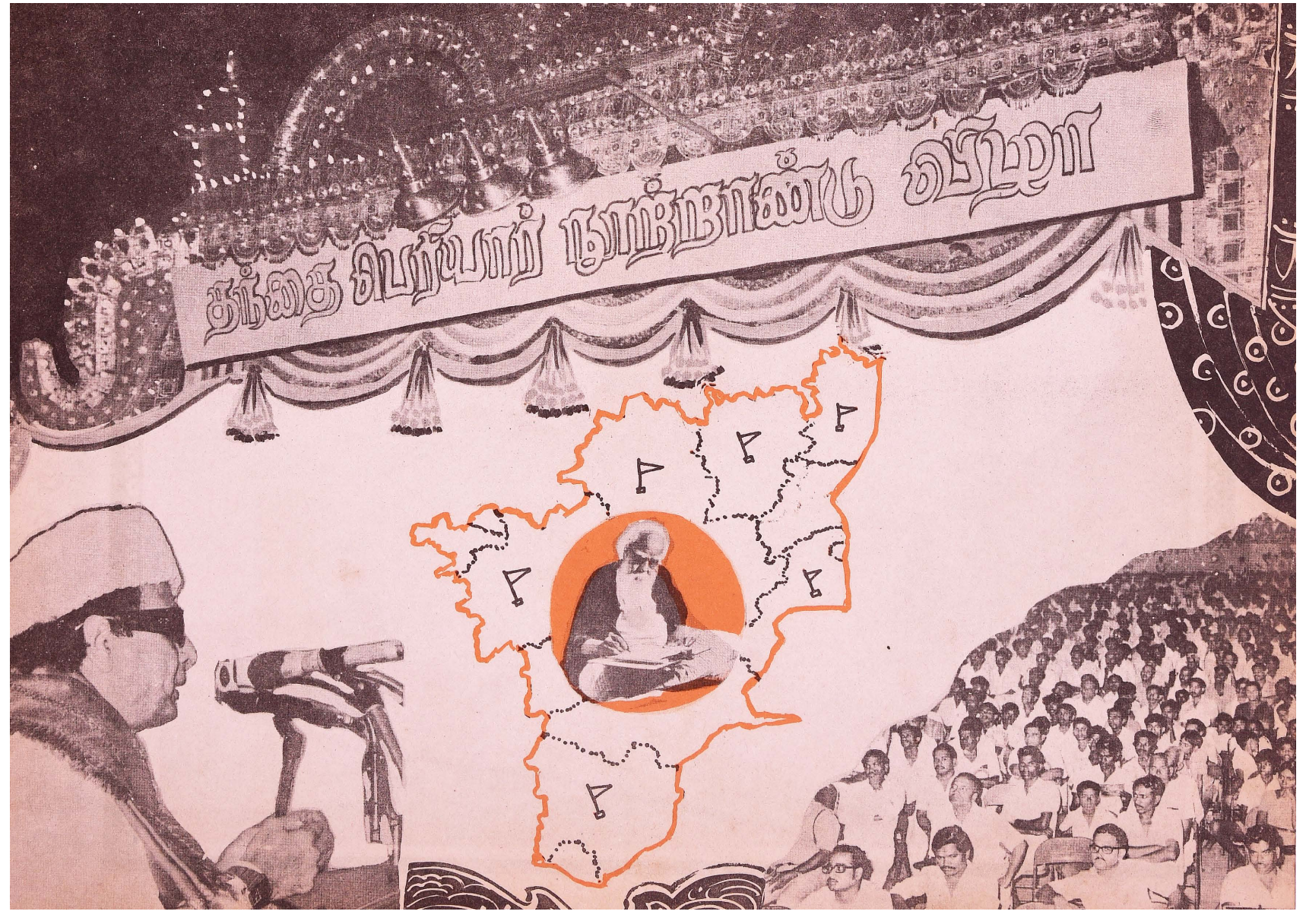
தமிழ் வெற்பாய் நாற்றிசைக்கும் வெற்றி

The Hurricane that uprooted growths poisonous to Society

— PERARIGNAR ANNA

An uneducated old man. An obstinate person from his youth. An agitator who was not aware that a party set-up should follow the nature of political objective. He never bothered about the feeling of the people he hurt and that those hurt will hurl abuses. He refused to be tactful. He was attacked by the very same persons whom he brought into the limelight. To this old man, the very idea of agitation tastes sweet. He has a long public service to his credit. But what has he gained? Has he obtained a knighthood? Had he any opportunity to go to Geneva at Government cost. Did he go to the States at the expense of the Government? What are his achievements. He was put in prison not less than eight times. This is Ramasami Naicker.

We are aware of the appearences of a good many extremists in the world. We are aware of speakers with gifted tongues, who have talked of atheism. We have seen heroes braving rivers of fire. We should understand the great difference between these persons and Periyar.

They talked and wrote among educated persons of mature understanding. Whereas Periyar's work was among the most illiterate of Tamil-Nadu amongst opposition including stone throwing and mud slinging. While the all-knowing men of letters of all fields, felt helpless even to check impostors, Periyar, slashed through like a hurricane, uprooting various growths poisonous to society in Tamil Nadu.

Periyar has great experience in having led a number of agitations. His relationship and understanding with the general public was so certain that the wrath of the rich could not harm him.

He sowed the seed of self respect in Tamil-Nadu. He has seen many a battlefield and participated in many a battle. Discarding luxurious living he lived a simple life.

Come forward to work. Don't ask me the means of livelihood. Come to rescue your community. Don't ask me whether you have the energy for it. Come, join the battle. Don't ask me when it will end. This was his war cry.

The qualities of intellectuals and revolutionaries like Socrates, Lenin, Bernadshaw and Rousseau, for which they are held in great esteem are all seen together in the form of Periyar.

A good number of persons have worked alongwith Periyar. Throughout I had the opportunity to be with him, more than the others. They have been very sweet days for me. Even as I recall them today, I derive great pleasure.

During his conversations he has come out with a number of thought provoking ideas. He taught me the art of fortifying my heart against hardships. He induced in me a great interest, pleasure and satisfaction in public service.

I found and accepted the leadership of this sole leader.

His life was a continuous struggle to uphold the right to speak what he felt at any cost. His success in this struggle was tremendous. He was not the sole person to enjoy the fruits of his success. Today, one and all enjoy the fruits of his labour. In Tamil Nadu, a state prevails, when one can express his views freely. This is the first phase of the success of an intellectual revolution. Periyar and Periyar alone is responsible for this. The service rendered by him to achieve this success is very appreciable.

And therefore, I generally refer to it—the great service rendered by Periyar is not the work of an individual, but it is an era, an important period of time, a turning point.

He has seen many battlefields. The successes achieved were very many. The battle he started is still going on.

I call those days the spring in may life, the days when I had the opportunity to join him in that battle.

PERIYAR CENTENARY
we Proudly Celebrate

Thanthai Periyar worked hard for the uplift the poor in the lowest rung of society. Therefore, the people should be made to understand his ideals.

The ideals of social reformation will be popularized by participating in the Periyar birth centenary celebrations. Those who are already aware of his ideals may become more active and those who have forgoten may recall them through these celebrations.

Periyar's functions are not conducted in order to get degree or to collect votes. By listening to the speeches even for a few hours one can learn much more than what one can learn over 10 or 15 years.

The Periyar birthday celebration conducted by the Government is to help recall the path of social reform.

(*Excerpts from the speeches made on* 4-8-79 *at the E. V. R. Centenary celebration at Pudukottai*).

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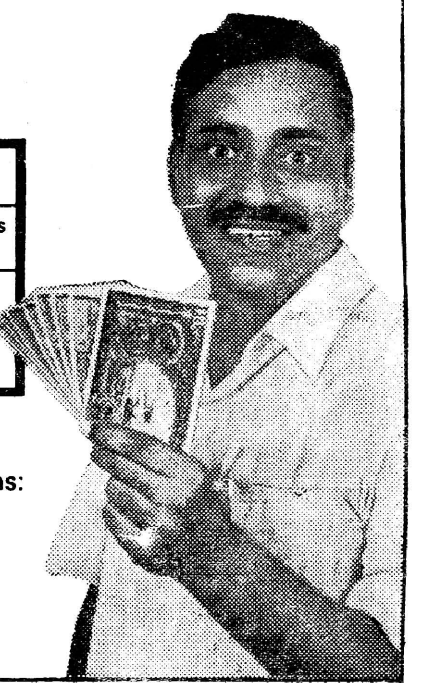
500	418.19	392.73	313.36



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A SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY

S. RAMACHANDRAN *B.E. (Hons) F.I.E,*

Hon. Minister for Electricity

Exactly a hundred years ago, Periyar was bor ; a new era was born.

It was a time when Indian Society was at the threshold of a change. It was a time when the feeling for freedom dawned among the native Indians. It was also the time when many social reformers attempted a change in the social structure.

Indian society suffers from a peculiar disease the 'caste' system. It is the caste system which divided society into water tight compartments. It is this system that put a stop to social mobility. It is the caste system which prevented social inter course.

In retrospect it is amazing that a 'cultured' society like ours should have not only accepted it, but perpetuated it with religious sanction.

Indian society was divided into four castes. Others were treated as outcastes or untouchables. Even among the four divisions of castes, there was a hierarchical system assigning status to a particular caste. The upper most was the 'Brahmin' caste, the priestly class. This was there for long, probably for many centuries.

It is this community which was in the fore-front in all walks of life, social ,political and economical. This community established a rapport even with Britishers, our rulers at that time. They functioned not only in the British Government but were also active participants in the freedom movement. Such is their dynamism and cheerful efficiency.

Tamil Nadu is not an exception to this Indian situation, except for the fact that it has its own distinct culture which treats all alike.

Periyar, a tenacious fighter against injustice, was born amidst these circumstances. In his anxiety to fight against alien rule, he joined the freedom movement. headed by the congress party and found himself in a pitiable predicament when he realised that British Rule would only be replaced by Brahmin Rule, if social equality were not attained by that time.

According to him, the Brahmin caste, constituting only 3 percent of the population, was enjoying as much as 70 to 80% of the benefits derived from society whereas 70% of the non-Brahmin population was not able to derive benefits even upto 10 or 15%. Being conscious of the injustice, that was likely to be meted out to the masses, he could no longer remain in the Congress, nor could the Congress contain him.

It was in 1925 that he came out of the Congress to fight for the just cause of the majority of the population in Tamil Nadu who are non-Brahmin.

In this crusade, many well-educated youth joined him, the chief among them being our late Leader ANNA. Not only did he attack the Brahmin domination in the society but he demolished the very foundation of the caste structure.

In this great venture, he achieved many firsts in the field of his battle.

He was the one who conducted all his battles without even a trace of violence, in spite of the fact that he was leading a majority of 20 Percent people against 3%.

He was the one who adopted tactics which yielded high dividends without sacrificing many of his volunters in the battlefield. His method can be described as 'threaten and withdraw'. He would threaten to burn the Constitution, the National Flag and even the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of our freedom movement, only to squeeze out of the Government certain concessions and privileges for his exploited masses. When he saw the prospect of achieving it, he never hesitated to withdraw.

He was the first to he a leader among leaders. Not only was he respected by leaders of all political parties and leaders of all shades of opinion but he was the father figure for a separate generation of leaders. If there is a modern political movement in Tamil Nadu started by the late Anna and conducted effectively by our energetic Chief Minister Hon'ble Thiru M.G.R. today, the credit goes to the Father figure-our late Periyar.

He was the first to realise his dreams in his own life-time when social equality is upper most in one's mind. He achieved what he wanted. There is nobody in Tamil Nadu today who is bold enough to ascertain the caste of the other. In fact, everyone is enlightened enough to get rid of the caste system altogether.

He was the first in spreading his movement not only in the social field but also in the political field to create awareness among the masses to elect such a party which would be rationalistic in dealing with social problems.

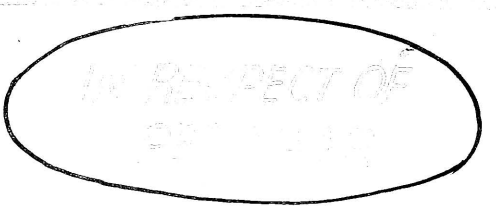
He was the first of his kind among social philosophers to denounce the very existence of God and question the validity of religion. By his marathon tour all over the state and by his numerous meetings all the time, he convinced illiterate masses, among whom he worked hard, of the rationale of his policy and programmes.

It was in 1974 that Periyar departed after long and active years of public life.

Though he is no more with us he has left with us a great country and a great ideal: A great country rid of the caste system, untouchability and all attendant social evils, a great ideal to treat humanity as one and serve them equally above the prejudices of caste, colour, race, religion, sex, language, and nation.

Probably he is the first to have left us his own follower to become the Chief Minister and to celebrate his centenary. A charismatic personality, by his own virtue, our Chief Minister Hon'ble Thiru M.G.R. has organised the people of Tamil Nadu to celebrate the centenary of Periyar, throughout the year. No other people could have celebrated any other leader like this. Even after his death, Periyar was made to achieve this first.

As Anna has aptly put it, Periyar was an era. When he ended, that era also ended.



Bent Smidt Hairsen

Social equality as a precondition of political "swaraj" was the basic idea when E. V. R. founded the Self-Respect movement. However, self-respect is not only a question of social equality, but as well a question of personal self-reliance. So E. V. R. had to face both sides in order to found true self-respect, and he did not hesitate to call what he considered his double-faced enemy by name : Caste and Superstition. To quote himself : "Man is disgraced by caste and caste is disgraced by religion. How can we destroy one keeping the other alive.

Previous reformers had attacked the caste system, but before E. V. R. none had realized that the roots of the caste syste m had to be found in religion. To fight both with one blow marks, however, the originality of E. V. R. Being a non-Brahmin himself, he spontaneously perceived the difficult definable term "religion" to be North-Indian Brahmanism and just this perception determined the success of his fight. The previous North-Indian reformers had to appeal to self-criticism in order to achieve their social aims, in so far as the customs they intended to reform were based on their own Aryan-religious tradition. But to make people realize that the roots of most social evils can be found only by looking nearer home has certainly nowhere any mass-appeal, nor had it in North-India. On the other had, to make people realize that they are caught in spiritual as well as social darkness because of suppression by intruders, this above all appeals to self-respect, and this was, particularly, what E. V. R. did.

So he took over the real leadership of the contemporary Tamil renaissance which till then had been a predominant elite-movement, but now was turned into a mass-movement. In this way self-respect was widened to include self-consciousness of the Tamilians as Tamilians, and the Self-Respect movement, eventually developed into the Dravida Kazhagam. But the Periyar himself has also left his mark on his followers, a heritage which may be hard to manage.

As a foreigner I see this heritage in the Periyar's radical sense of human dignity and his quest for self-respect as the undispensable precondition of any achievement, socially as well as politically. He fought during a lifetime, and not in vain, in order to awaken this quest among the Tamilian people. But on the other hand, self-respect itself is a precondition, a precondition, namely, of true regard for one's fellow human beings.

To my mind this is the lasting challenge which the Periyar has left, a challenge, which characteristically corresponds to the conception of human greatness as elaborated in the Sacred Kural.

The Morning Star of Tamil Nadu

R M. VEERAPPAN,
Hon'ble Minister for Information and Religious Endowment

Thanthai Periyar—This is not just the name of a leader. It is the name of an era. 75 years of the history of Tamil Nadu can be traced in his life.

Peerless leaders, great intellectuals, philosophers, freedom fighters, social reformers have appeared in this world. He appeared to have the dynamic force of all these luminaries unified in himself.

He tried to eradicate-nay, he faught against the evils of casteism brought about by religion, social inequalities, slavery of women, religious bigotry and superstitious beliefs which are a disgrace to mankind. He lit the lamp to dispel the darkness in society. He castigated these cancerous social evils and paved a revolutionary path for a new world. He swam against the current for sixty years.

If we keenly follow the activities and programmes of this father of agitations the lion undaunted by prison walls—we can understand that he has carved out a path of great purity and uprightness, which we should try to emulate.

He believed that certain beliefs and norms were the cause for social evils and degradition. Not only did he believe; he fully understood them. Therefore he defied such beliefs. He attacked vehemently those who were the cause for the spread of such beliefs. He fought ruthlessly against the structures which were the basis for it.

His voice of dissent was full of revolutionary fire. The words from his pen shot out like atom bombs. His feelings burst forth like a volcano because he was not able to tolerate the miseries of society. He raised his war cry. His agitations differed vastly from other social reformers.

But this leader who was keenly bent on agitation—a great leader who could chanellize the energies of men, who had the power to destroy his opponents at the crook of his finger, who could command legions of

fighters, a leader who had no equals, he in his lifetime, saw to it that those who opposed him, the symbols which he wanted to destroy, or those believers who opposed him, never came to any harm. The peaceful and righteous manner in which he looked after their welfare—should be emulated by his followers.

Those who point out that Thanthai Periyar had class hatred, should look back on his life.

Those who call him an antagonist of Asthikas should look carefully into 60 years of his life.

Throughout his life, this great leader saw to it that his movement of rationalism did not harm the particular section of the people who were determined to protect the evils of social tradition and religious tradition that were a part of the Hindu social fabric.

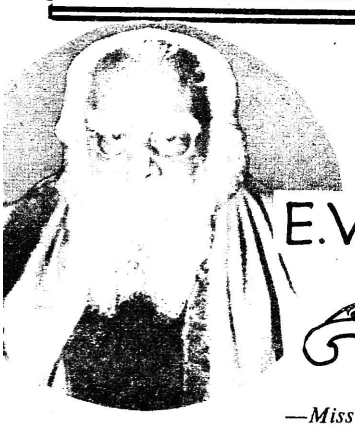
He opposed superstitious beliefs and he opposed them strongly. But he did not oppose the society nor the people who were the cause for it. He had a great affection for people. He was a great humanitrarian. Only if this great truth were understood can one understand Periyar's great strength. This was the quality pointed out by Anna. Periyar who started his work in the freedom movement realized from Gandhiji's philosophy that independence could be complete only when social freedom was achieved. That was why Periyar chose to follow an independent path, instead of becoming a slave to political intrigues, desire for power and the fruits of office.

The journey Periyar undertook was one of hardship. To undertake this journey one should have indomitable courage and unlimited zeal. Periyar had both in abundance, and was able to face success in the first phase, resulting in the formation of Anna's Government in 1967.

The Tamil people were able to realize the ideals of Periyar with the formation of Anna's Government as a first step and the work still goes on. Periyar is not with us today. Perarignar Anna who was introduced by Periyar to the Tamil society is also no more. But the Government formed by Anna still continues.

To rekindle his memories, the Government of Anna which realizes the ideals of Periyar, has drawn up a programme to celebrate the centenary of Periyar—the morning star, right through the year.

Let us bow to the leader par excellance of the 20th century—an era in the annals of Tamil history. Let us take a pledge to follow his footsteps.



PERIYAR E.V. RAMASAMY

—Miss ANITA DIEHL

University of LUND, Sweden.

In Periyar's propaganda, an ethical - structure, based on a concept of man, is apparent. He advocates strongly to and determined by life in this world, as he firmly repudiates any transcendental power, influence, or accent.

In thinking of man as a rational being, Periyar optimistically ascribes to him both good-will and dignity He emphasises Social duty, equality and justice in word which sometimes are obviously connected with the New Testament. "These words are often repeated by Periyar as virtues required of man and indispensable to Society. Olukkam (good behaviour) Nanneri (integrity) and Unmai (truth) when using this terminilogy, Periyar betrays his indigenous back-ground.

"Periyar is the pragmatic propagandist -attacking what he sees wrong in religious influence on society, namely Brahmin domination. He cannot be called as atheistic philosopher.

"In his attack on the Brahmin as high caste-the representative of religio-social domination, the social side of Periyar's ideology is manifested. Just as the vaikom experience in 1924 taught Periyar that anti-Brahminism meant the eradication of religion, this too taught 'The Vaikom Hero" that anti-Brahminism meant the eradication of caste.

Robert G. Ingersoll, the American atheist and Rationalist is often quoted in the speeches and writing of the D.K. movement. Ingersoll has been translated into Tamil-for instance the booklet Irandu Valikal (TWO WAYS) published in 1968. At an interview Periyar stated My disciples read Ingersol to me and I accepted many of his ideas and used them in my propaganda".

The question why Ingersoll proved attractive to Periyar seems significant. According to Irschick, the Ingersoll influence came to Periyar through C.N. Annadurai who had read him and who was impressed by the American philosopher. The influence of Ingersol on Periyar was apparent after his trip to Russia in 1931.

The Personality of Periyar in his effective manifestations of an active propagandist, creating an image of the clear contours has emerged out of personal experiences. Periyar's propaganda is the reflections of his personality. An enumeration of the main trends and events of recent history in South India will, therefore, give a key to his - personality and at the same time answer the question of the development of his influence. In his fierce attacks on existing South Indian structures, religion-and social tradition guided by Brahmins, Periyar has contributed to the growing sense of Tamil identity. He broke with latent Hindu fatalism, when in his bold Rationalism, he proclaimid his message of change and improvement which is apparent behind his many anti-slogans.

MARTIN LUTHER of TamilNadu

Periyar has carved out a niche in the Hall of Fame in Tamilnadu and beyond. Since the thirties and earlier Periyar was doing revolutionary propaganda in the promotion of social justice. He aroused conscious of sub-merged communities in the new awakening of their human dignity and equality. During those years a friend of mine occasionally used to mention about the impact of "Kudiyarasu" which was negating existence of "God" and propagating ideas of social equality and communical justice for depressed classes, castes and communities.

My first acquaintanceship with Periyar was quite accidental. During the year 1930 I worked for the Justice Party candidates in the City of Madras. Most of them were elected to the then Madras Legislative Council. Dewan Bahadur A. Ramaswami Mudaliyar got elected for the then Central Legislative Assembly and continued to function for full four years. The Indian National Congress decided to contest the Central Legislative Assembly elections in 1934. As a student of Panchaiyappa's College I worked for his election. There was a sweeping success achieved by the Indian National Congress in the later half of 1934 Central Legislative Assembly elections. Periyar Ramaswamy did vigorous propaganda for the success of A.Ramaswamy Mudaliyar but in vain.

In 1938 I was practising as an Advocate in the Courts of North Arcot District. The late Samy Naidu of Tirupattur was known to me. Sir Kurma Venkata Reddy Naidu and Periyar addressed the Mohammedans of Arcot town in the later half of 1939. During the year 1939 Muslims of India were awakened to new consciousness of their political rights by Mr. Jinnah who was spelling out the idea of separate nationhood in rahter ambivalent terms. I even now distinctly remember that both these speakers exhorted the Muslims of Arcot to follow the lead of Mr.Jihhah fearlessly and unflinchingly.

Periyar was living during the year 1950 in one street named after a muslim near Mount Road. I was often making visits to him. Atleast twice "Kuthcosi" Gurusamy came and consulted me on certain legal matters, even in regard to the new social reform movement or political agitations which Periyar started during that decade. I had so much of respect and reverance for Periyar that although Periyar wanted to come to my residence and consult me, I made it a point to meet him in his house and give my legal advice about the legal implications of some of his movements or agitations either socio-political or political.

K. NARAYANASWAMY,
Hon'ble Minister for Law.

In October 1954 I appeared for Periyar and others in the High Court of Judicature at Madras. A complaint was filed by Thiru A. Veerabhadran Chettiar against Periyar for an alledged offence under sections 295 and 295-A of the Indian Penal Code. The complaint was that Periyar broke the mud-image of Ganesa in public at the Town Hall Maidan of Tiruchirapalli on 27.5.1953 at 5.30 p.m. The First Additional First Class Magistrate, Trichirapalli dismissed the complaint under section 203 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Thiru Veerabhadran Chettiar took up the matter by way of revision to the Court of Sessions Judge of Tiruchirapalli Division. The Sessions Judge refused to order further enquiry and dismissed the revision petition. Thiru Veerabadran Chet-

tiar sought to revise the order of the Sessions Judge of Tiruchirapalli before the High Court of Madras. I appeared for Periyar. The petition filed by Thiru Veerabhadran Chettiar was dismissed on 13th October 1954. (The judgement of the High Court in the case field by Thiru Veerabhadran Chettia- is reported in 1955 I M.L.J. page 368)

In the year 1956 I invited him for a lunch with me. I was living in No.1, Daniel Street. I have a distinct recollection that I also invited, the late lamented Thiru V.L.Ethiraj, Justice Govinda Menon among others. I still remember Thiru Justice W.S. Krishnaswamy Naidu (who is happily with us) was one of the invitees. It is well known that Periyar was rather influential with the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Perunthalaivar Kamaraj. In the course of lunch and conversation, Justice Govinda Menon gave me a good good chit about my stature as a Lawyer. Thiru Ethiraj sportingly conveyed a distinct hint to Periyar that my stature at the Bar must be duly recognised by the then Government! Periyar smiled and smiled! I am aglad to notice that nothing came out of this during the Congress regime. I want to lay emphasis on one aspect of this luncheon. I told Periyar that the lunch was to be at 1.00 p.m. at my residence. He arrived punctually at 1.00 p.m. An Englishman, whose virtue is punctuality, would have been amazed at the precision and accuracy of the punctuality practised by Periyar. How many of us know the virtues of punctuality today!

(It may not be totally irrelevant to mention that at the end of 1952 or at the beginning of 1953 Thiru M.G.R. (as he then was known) came to my residence with Thiru Ponnambalanar and gave me a word of appreciation for my services in what was known as [illegible] in which [illegible] were arraigned as accused by the Rajaji Administration.)

I made visits to Periyar when he was either ailing or convalescing in the General Hospital.

After I became a permanent Judge of the Madras High Court I wanted to pay my respects to Periyar. On one occasion Periyar recollected a meeting between him and the then Chief Minister Thiru Anna. at Pattiveeranpatti. He told me details of his successfully persuading the Chief Minister to persuade me to accept the offer of a Permanent Judgeship when I was invited by the then Chief Justice to accept the said offer. Until his sad death, I used to make now and then a few calls on Periyar at Periyar Thidal.

Periyar was the Martin Luther of revolutionary protestant social reformation in the State of Tamil Nadu. The repercussions of his propaganda have had an extensive and wide spread fall out throughout India today. Today his ideas are being imbibed and propagated throughout India by the sub-merged communities suffering from the vicious, diabolic, cruel caste system. He will live in the history of India permanently like the Buddha and Martin Luther of Christian history. May his noble example and spirit of sacrifice inspire all the Tamilians to accomplish the tasks left behind him thus fulfilling his dreams and aspirations for a democratic, egalitarian, equalitarian and casteless society in India in general and in the State of Tamil Nadu in particular.

The Dravidian Movement

In 1925, he organized the 'Self Respect movement' designed as a Dravidian uplift, seeking to expose the Brahmin tyranny and the deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu Life. Naicker publicly ridiculed the puranas as fairy tales, not only imaginary and irrational but grossly immoral as well. Influenced in his religious thinking by Robert Ingersoll and having translated much of his writing into Tamil, Naicker still bitter from his experiences as a Sanyasi attacked religion as the tool of Brahminical control. He carried on active propaganda in an attempt to rid the people of Puranic Hinduism and wean them away from religious ceremonies requiring the priestly service of the Brahmin. He denounced caste observances, child marriage and enforced widow-hood, and attacked the Laws of Manu which he called the basis of the entire Hindu Social fabric of caste, and described as not only essentially, but totally inhuman. The Laws Naicker pointed out, were designed to secure the supremacy of the Brahmin and to ensure his unquestioned authority. In order to propagate his views, he founded a Tamil Journal Kudi Arasu (People's Government).

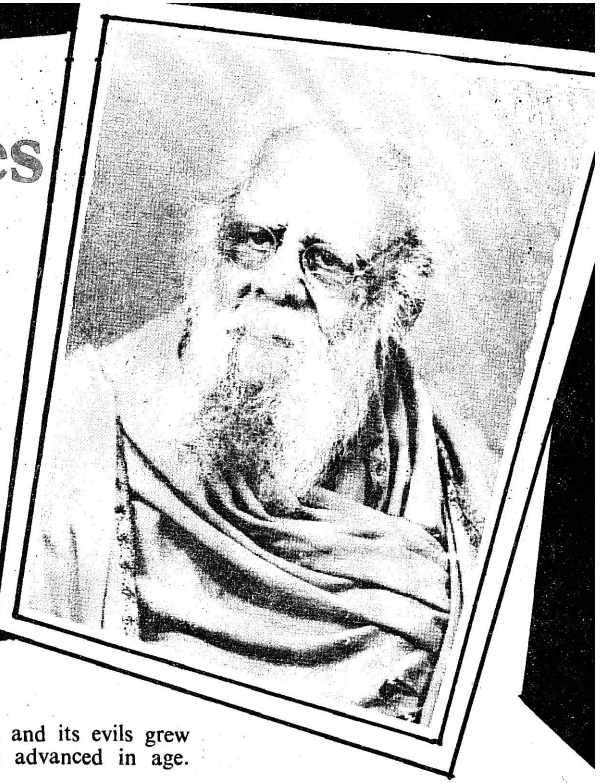
"Naicker waved black flags of rebellion in his first, anti-Hindi compaign. The agitation against the imposition of Hindi brought Naicker to the fore-front of attention, and influenced the non-Brahmin."

"As in the Self-Respect Movement, one of Naicker's basic objectives was to remove all 'Superstitious belief' based upon religion or tradition. No member was allowed to wear the Sectarian marks of faith across his fore-head. Members were urged to boycott the use of Brahmin priests in ceremonies. He campaighed vigoursly for widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage.

—*Robert. L. Hardgrave Jr.*

University of Chicago

The Socrates of the 20th Century



N. D. SUNDARAVADIVELU

Former Vice-Chanceller Madras University

Thanthai Periyar E. V. Ramasami was the Socrates of the twentieth century. Like Socrates of Athens, Thanthai Periyar would not deviate from the path of rationalism for fear or favour. Periyar Ramasami led a dynamic public life till his end in the ripe old age of ninety-five. This great colossus was a bold thinker, an original thinker and a revolutionary thinker who expressed himself on all occassions with frankness bordering on bluntness and effectiveness.

Thanthai Periyar Ramasami was more than a great individual. He was the personification of a great and revolutionary movement. The self respect movement of which, this great thinker and agitator was the founder, stood for, fought and is still fighting against every form of injustice. Humanism is the hall mark of Periyar's life long mission. Preservation of human dignity and ensurement of equality between all men and between men and women, without any reference to colour, creed and caste were the noble causes for which Periyar fought a relentless battle lasting more than half a century.

Even as a young boy of nine or ten years E. V. Ramasami revolted against the age old custom of caste inhibitions with regard to drinking and eating. Defying parental orders not to drink or eat in the homes of people dubbed by custom to be inferior to his caste, he incurred the wrath of his parents. This revolt against casteism and its evils grew unabated as he advanced in age.

E. V. Ramasami's parents having failed in their attempts to enforce caste discipline in this young boy, withdrew him from school by the time he came to the fourth grade. They put him to apprenticeship at his father's mundy. He became a successful dealer and soon an independent businessman. Wealth and popularity grew fast.

E. V. Ramasami's debut into public life was through the Municipal council of Erode. He became the chairman of the Erode Municipal council. It was E. V. Ramasami who was responsible for bringing for the first time, protected water supply to the town of Erode.

At that time, the Indian National Congress was becoming under the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, a real mass movement, drawing into its fold men and women of different backgrounds. E. V. Ramasami, the strong man of Erode came to be attracted by the goal of political freedom from foreign rule. He joined the Indian National Congress and became an activist in that movement. In response to Gandhi's call for non-co-operation with the British administration E. V. Ramasami gave up un-hesitatingly the Chairmanship of the Municipal Council as well as twenty eight other honorary offices.

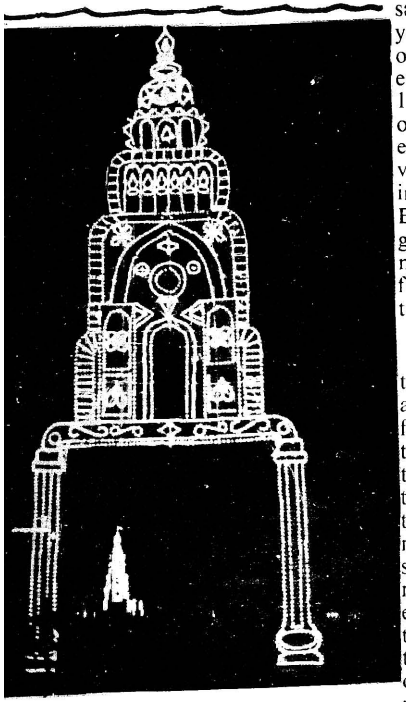
Whatever he undertook, E. V. Ramasami would throw his heart and 'Soul' into it. His social status, powerful oratory, organising capacity and earnestness of purpose were responsible in a great measure for building up the Indian National Congress in Tamilnadu as a broad based and strong organisation. E.V. Ramasami was Secretary of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee and President of that Committee respectively for a period of two years each.

The non-co-operation programme of Gandhiji cost E. V. Ramasami a great deal. Promissory notes and mortgage bonds to the value of Rs. 50,000 were about to become time barred. E.V. Ramasami deliberately chose to lose that much of money of the early twenties by refusing to go to a court of law, even through a third party, for the recovery of the amounts due.

Prohibition was an important item of the Gandhian programme. In pursuance of this E. V. Ramasami organised the first picketing of a toddy shop in Erode. This resulted in his first imprisonment. Thanks to Ramasami's encouragement, his wife, Nagammal of revered memory and his sister Kannammal, a great social worker also took part in his picketting compaign.

These ladies were the pioneers in such picketting in our country.

A coconunt grove, belonging to E. V. R's family, was leased earlier for toddy tapping. When he accepted prohibition as his goal, Ramasami tried in vain to persuade the lessee to take adequate compensation from him and to give up the right to tap toddy. When the lessee insisted on his 'last drop of toddy' Ramasami saw to it that all the five hundred trees in the grove were felled down overnight by men hired by him.



Casteism is a sore pestering Hindu society for thousands of years. Its manifestations are varied in form. Apart from the cruelty of segregating millions of our own brothers and sisters in separate, secluded insanitary colonies, tens of millions were denied the basic human rights of access to public streetrs, roads, tanks, wells, choultries etc.

Early in 1924, in the far off town of Vaikkam in the then Travancore State revolt against the tradition that Ezhavers and similar castes could not go through the streets around the temple, erupted. Volunteers courted arrest by defying this ban. The organisers were jailed in a lot.

E. V. Ramasami then President of the Tamilnadu congress committee was invited to take charge of the Vaikkam satyagraha. Periyar did accept the invitation and led the Satyagraha, underwent imprisonment twice on this count but brought the struggle to a successful end. Not only the Public streets of vaikkam but also the public roads and street throughtout the State were thrown open to all persons, irrespective of their caste.

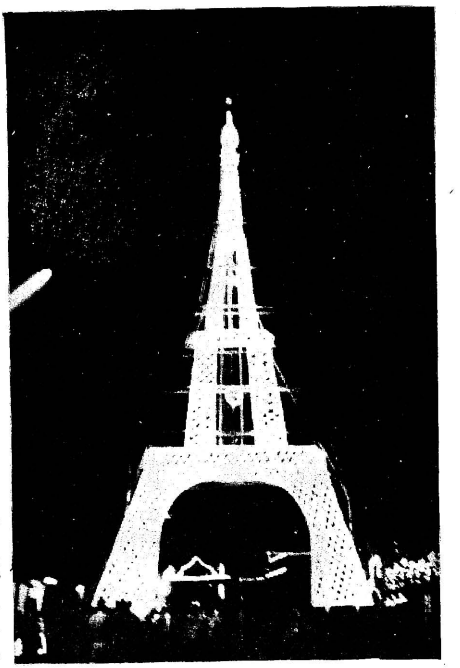
As a prominent leader of the Congress in Tamilnadu, E. V. Ramasami compaigned for about six years for the acceptance in principle of communal representation in elected positions and, services. In late 1925, in the provincial conference of the Congress held at Kacheepuram even a discussion of this subject was vetoed. That was a turning point in the course of public service of E.V. Ramasami. He left the congress, once for all, despite the prominent position he then held and the future prospects, it would have given to him.

Ever since E. V. Ramasami left the Congress, he carried on, year after year, a whirlwind campaign for the total abolition of castes and their heirarchy. The orthodox and the conservatives tried to stem the tide of rationalism and revolt by throwing the sand bags of hoariness, religious faith, superstitions, quoting scriptures in the process. The self respect movement was forced to examine these assertions and scriptures in minute details and to expose to the people at large that most of our scriptures, rites and practices were mere devices to bolster up the decadent caste system.

Inspite of universal illiteracy, ignorance and mass hysteria nurtured by our festivals, the hold of caste, traditions, rites etc., on Tamil society had lesened a great deal thanks to Periyar's campaign.

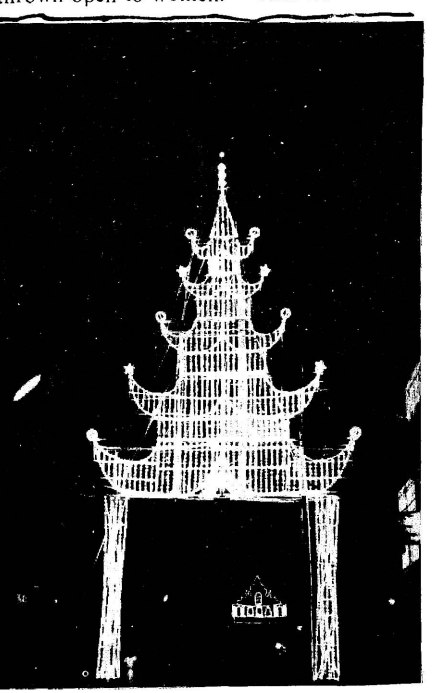
No family of any standing in Tamilnadu can now claim absence of inter caste marriage in its close circles. Both under the ageis of the self respect movement as well as in folds outside it, the number of inter-caste marriages have been steadily increasing during the last half a century. Caste titles are rarely to be found attached to the names of present day youth.

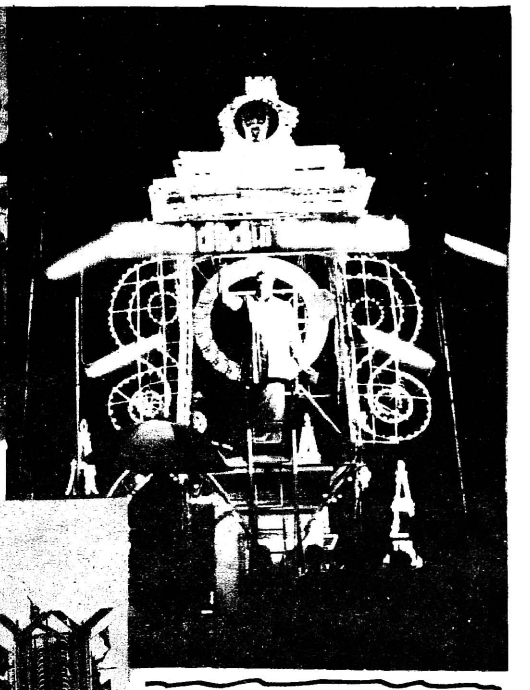
As a result of Periyar's movement, even the humblest of our citi-



zens have come to realise the value and importance of education including higher and professional education.

Long ago, in the year 1931, the second provincial self respect, women's conference held at Virudunagar passed a resolution to the effect that all professions should be thrown open to women. What was

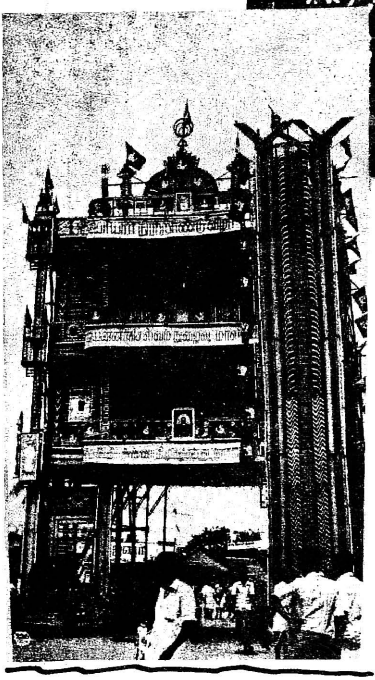




blasphemy then, is fast becoming the order of the day. In 1978, as many as 196 girls were selected out of a total selection of about 1,055 for admissions into the Engineering Colleges in Tamil Nadu. The day is not far off when girls will attain parity with boys in such admissions. If Tamilnadu and Tamilians are comparitively devoid of bigotry caste and communal hatred it is in a great measure due to the ceaseless efforts of Periyar, and his devoted disciplines of unflinching loyalty, ready for any sacrifice at the call of their guru.

Periyar's life long campaign encampassed the economic order also—As early as May 1930, Periyar pointed out to the Second provincial Self respect Conference at Erode that the abolition of the current economic system of the haves and have nots, would be the future direction the movement has to take to. His conviction in favour of socialism ensuring a decent, human living for all citizens was strengthened after his extension tour in the soviet Union in the second half of 1932. On his return to India, he called for meeting of the activisits of his movement and in collaboration with the veteran communist, comrade M. Singaravelu, drew up a self respect socialist programme. In due course this came to be accepted by the then Justice party as part of its programme.

The British Government, which at that point of time, took strong measures to suppress propagation of communist ideas, prosecuted Periyar Ramasami, the Editor of 'Kudi Arasu' and his sister Kannam mal, the publisher of that weekly for sedition and propagation of communism. Both were convicted and



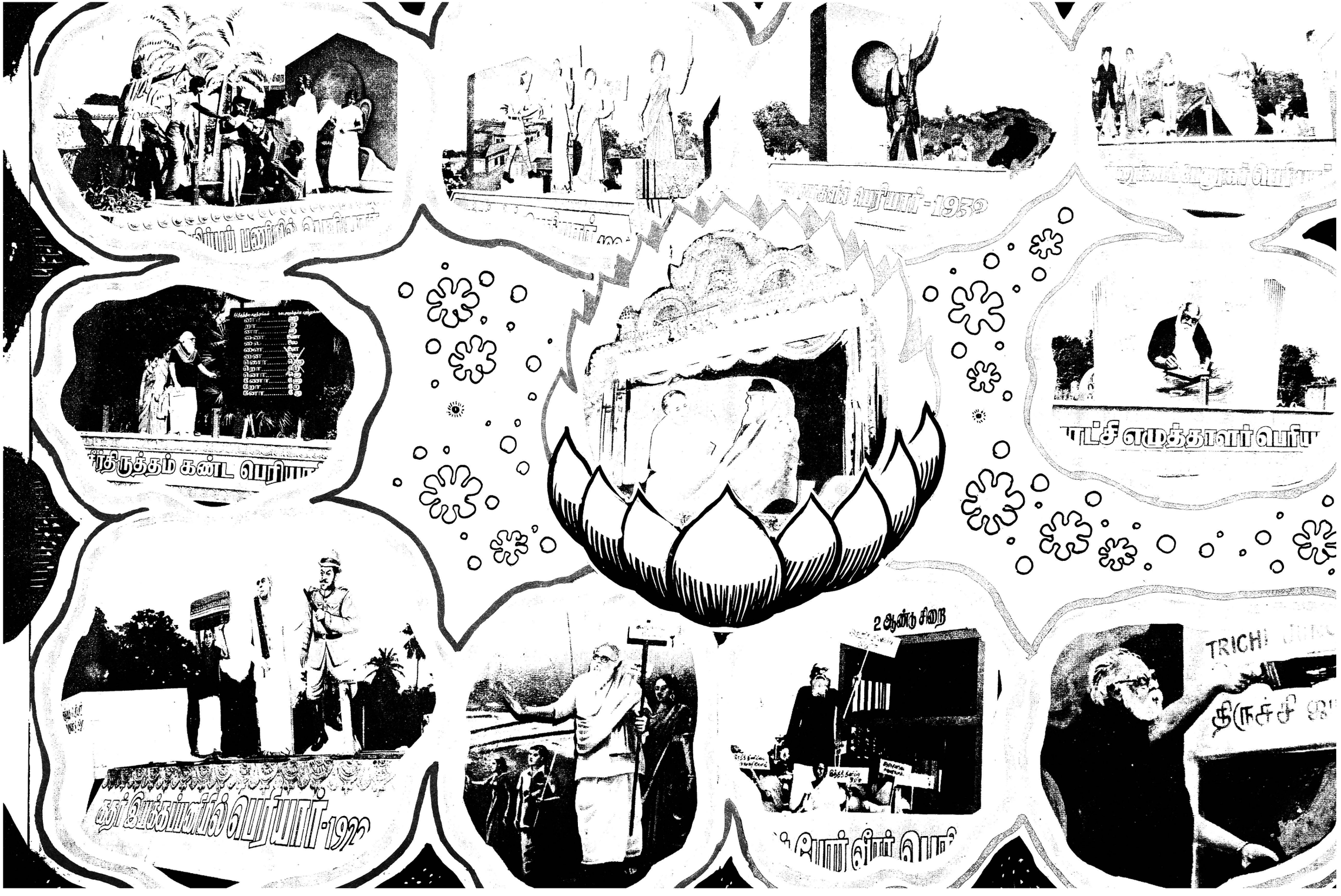
sentenced to six months imprisonment.

Inspite of it, the establishment of Socialist order in our society remained one of the main objectives of the self respect movement and the Dravida Kazhakam. Even during the periods when Periyar was not on friendly terms with the communist party, he did not backout or under value the importance and urgency of working for a socialist society.

Thanthai Periyar Ramasami, the most towering of the South Indian leaders of recent times was unsurpassed by any one either in the length of his service or the volume and nature of sacrifice or the daring of his revolutionary campaigns, or the number of public meetings addressed, or the nature and volume of opposition he had to face, conquer or even in the number of times he went to prison for public causes. In all, Periyar Ramasami had to undergo twenty one terms of imprisonment, both during the British rule and during the Swadeshi rule.

Inspite of his intense and burning desire to bring in a new, casteless and classless society, devoid of superstition, inspite of the numerous and bitter agitations he had to lead, Periyar Ramasami never allowed violence to raise its ugly head in his movement. This, I consider, is the greatest tribute of our multi—dimensional Revolutionary Thanthai Periyar. No wonder the image of Thanthai Periyar is enshrined in the hearts of millions of Tamilians living in India and abroad.

May Periyar's spirit of equality engulf us. May the Path of rationalism, which our Thanthai showed be ours for ever. May humanity out grow its diseases of caste complexes, warring denominations and exploitation of man by man, group by group and women by men. May we all learn to live as brothers and sisters of equal worth and dignity.



Periyar's Speeches

A. P. JANARDANAM, M.P.,

In 1934, as a boy of 14, I went to the Fort Maidan in Vellore. On that day, a justice party meeting was held. It was attended by about three thousand people. After some speakers, Periyar, with his flowing beard, chocolate shawl and leonine voice held the audience spell bound. He made out a good case for his party and bitterly denounced superstition. I was completely converted. From that day Periyar is my hero.

Periyar, for over 50 years, toured every nook of the Tamil land and delivered thousands of speeches. He pleaded for social justice, Social Reform, a renaissance, a new Order, a new outlook. He roused the people from ages of slumber. He attacked everything that hindered Free Thought, he did not spare the gods, the sastras, the puranas. He was the smasher of myths and illusions, with unparalled courage he ridiculed the customs which governed the masses from cradle to grave.

He did not mince words, He did not cloud the issues with the dust of dialectics. He never believed in soothing platitudes or honeyed phrases. He never played to the gallery. He chided, ridiculed, scorned, and came down heavily on the opponents.

But he was utterly sincere. He was moved by the plight of the Sudras and the Chandalas of the Hindu Order. On behalf of them, to restore their self-respect, to secure them justice, to remove their digma, he carried on a relentless, remorseless, remarkable crusade to the end. Even at the very ripe age of 93, he gave his clarion call in ringing tones. He was moved to elemental fury at the sight of the high and the mighty prostrating before ravenous, rotten, heartless, inhuman leeches who fattended and battended on the blood and sweat of the toiling masses. He hurled strong epithets, bombarded the citadels of orthodoxy and obscurantism and blasted the myth of Varanashrama monopoly.

Caste, according to him, was the greatest villain in India. High

caste arrogance was fought by Buddha, the Siddhas, Valluvar and Vallalar, Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda, Narayana guru and Gandhiji. But, Periyar alone, day in and day out, made his main plank and toured every nook of the country, bulldozing the structure with his fiery speeches.

He went to the very root of the matter. Utterly fearless, unburdened by pedantic lore, straight, clear hard-hitting, reaching direct the hearts of the hearers. He boldly attacked the puranic characters and shocked the people to reason.

He preferred the scalpel to mere medicine. He said that the desperate condition of the land called for surgery. He lashed out at the cunning, diabolical machinations of the capitalists by birth. He dynamited the very basis of Hindu hegemony and exhorted the people to become Rationalists and humanists.

His sincerety, dedication and down to-earth approach had very good effect. Though he went against the current, though he pricked many a bubble, though he was very straight, very frank, very unvarnished though he did not mince his words, though he threw his harsh but true findings in the face, though he lashed right and left with stinging effect, his certainty, conviction and clarity silenced the doubters, rallied the wavers and fools who came to scoff and stone, remained to hear.

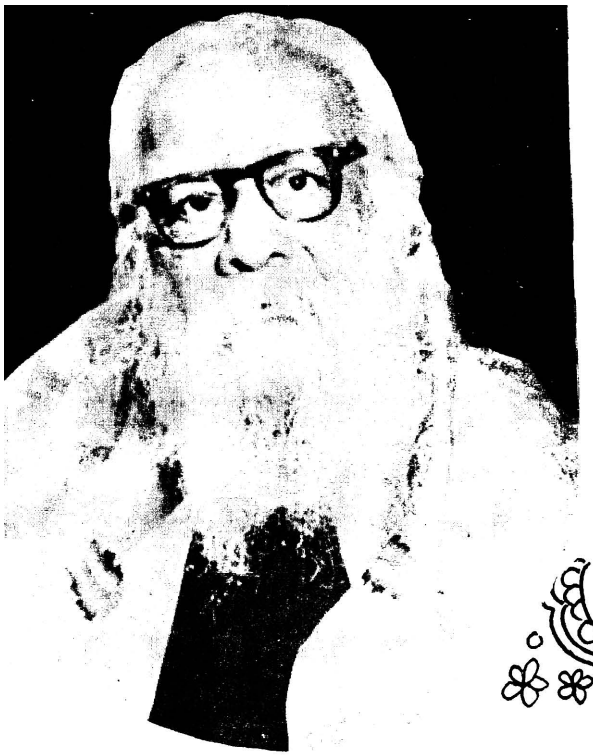
He rose with the storm. The heckling, the cat-calls, the stones and missiles, simply made this Erode engine gather speed. With his clear, steady, unruffled, vigorous, on the spot replies, the opponents were silenced.

He was at his best when he answered questions. Once in Mannargudi, he went on replying to questions. Suddenly, the pencil end of the questioner broke. Periyar, having observed this, offered his pen to the questioner, exhorting him to write more questions. The poor man was overwhelmed.

Some of Periyar's speeches have been tape-recorded. Many have been published. The Tamilnadu Government under the able stewardship of the charismatic chief Minister M. G. R. is bringing out his sayings. Particular thanks are due to Mr. V. Anaimuthu of Trichy, whose three volumes of Periyar's writings and speeches are splendid.

Periyar's speeches roused a fallen people. They gave a new life and revolutionised thought, reform and conduct in South India.

They will inspire people for thousands of years. Periyar is the 20th Century Tiruvalluvar in Black shirt !



The Magnificient Messiah

S. V. CHITTI BABU

former Vice-Chancellor,
Madurai Kamarajar University

Spelling out the striking characteristics of a truly great man, Channing once observed thus: "The greatest man is he who chooses the right with invincible resolution; who resists the sorest temptations from within and without; who bears the heaviest burdens carefully;who is calmest in storms and most fearless under menance and frowns; whose reliance on truth and virtue is most unflattering" Our beloved Periyar eminently measures up to this exquisite definition of greatness. The cause he whole-heartedly espoused and undauntedly fought for was a right one because it meant the emancipation of society from the chocking grip of caste tyranny and the pernicious influence of obscurant reli gious practices, ridiculous customs and bizarre superstitions. With steadfastness of purpose he abandoned a life of ease and comfort despite his having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth as he was' Power and pelf had no attraction for him. Nor could he be tempted with ministerial offices by vested interests. On the contrary he took upon himself the himalayan task of uplifting the forsaken and the forlorn, the suppressed and the oppressed from the slough of social degradation and misery and restoring them to their rightful place in the social set-up. In his attempt to accomplish this task he encountered many an impediment of abominable nature. But he overcame every such obstacle with unflagging courage. Even in the face of a grim challenge he was collected and composed. He stood four-square against all storms of vehement criticism of his principles and policies and violent demonstration against his campaigns for social justice by such sections of the community as were desperately clinging to the "ancient regime". As an embattled crusader against all iniquity, sham and hypocrisy he determinedly relied on his armour of virtue and sword of truth.

CRUSADER AGAINST SOCIAL INEQUALITIES:

Periyar could not tolerate society riven by differences based on birth and sex. The perpetuation of a caste system dividing people into high-born and low-born, was anathema to him and he was devastaingly critical of the Sastras and Puranas which lent support to the so-called theory of Karma and transmigration of soul. He was unsparing in exploding all the ancient myths which had been relied upon by such people claiming caste superiority. The epic battle he successfully headed against the bastions of orthodoxy and caste arrogance at Vaikkom is verily a saga of indomitable valour and heroism which evoked the spontaneous applause of our national leaders like Gandhiji. Even as he directed his onslaughts against the time-worn practices of castesism and communalisms he adroitly championed the claims of womanhood for social equality. He used to say that any real rivalry of the sexes is the sheerest folly and most unnatural - nonsense. To brand women as the weaker sex was most revolting to him.He averred that it was the law of eternal justice that man could not degrade women himself falling into degradation. Love and devotion discretion and good nature, he said, were the distinguishing ornaments of womenhood. As such he could not see how women who were entitled to equal respect and treatment could be regarded as mere appendages to a male-dominated society.

RIGHTER OF WRONGS:

It was his vehement thesis that the weaker sections of society had been for centuries deliberately left wallowing in the mire of ignorance by a self-seeking caste conscious minority of people who manveuvred to keep to themselves a monopoly of all educational benefits. He therefore took up cudgels against this age-old and atrocious wrong and mounted a vigorous propaganda for the equalisation of educational opportunities and reservation of jobs in government services for the socially and educationally

backward communities. His memorable success in this regard will for ever remain inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of Tamilnadu.

It is common knowledge how during the time when Thiru Kamaraj, the doughtly protector of the poor held the reins of government in our state, Periyar went all out to support the former in his matcheless endeavours to democratise education, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels. This he did in spite of certain ideological differences with Thiru Kamaraj, and it was a measure of his genuine concern for the education of the unprivileged and neglected segment of society.

Humanist with a Scientific Outlook:

Speaking of education, Periyar's impassioned plea was for an education that liberated children from the strangle hold of hoary beliefs, untenable doctrines, primitive concepts and ante-diluvian ideas which caused intellectual sterility and inertia. To this end he zealously advocated the inculcation of scientific thinking in the minds of the young right from the beginning so that it may enkindle and keep alive their desire to discover their own potential without external restraints. According to Periyar, becoming human means "getting into and out of deep waters". This means taking risks by asking questions for which there are no ready copy-book answers. Such behaviour naturally "gets the child into deep waters". Teachers should recognise this and have the courage to face any kind of questions that the child would like to ask so that learning is not robbed of its excitement. They should help children move in the direction of imagining and giving free vent to promising ideas and original suggestions, however, imperfect or unconventional. When a person is brow-beaten to submission to external threats and pressures he gives up a part of his humanness. As Periyar rightly observes, human potentialities develop as the child learns the value of self-perception and self-expression and finds some one who cares to listen to him as well as encourage him in his adventurous search for new aspects of the truth. In this context one is reminded of what Thorean said:

> "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him keep step to the music that he hears, however measured or far-away".

Firm Man of Reason:

It is Sir W. Drummond who has aptly remarked: "He that will not reason is a bigot; he that cannot reason is a fool; he that dares not reason is a slave". Inseparably wedded to reason, Periyar was impatient with a society of bigots, fools and slaves. He was quick to confute error, reprove bigotry, expose hyprocrisy, condemn slavery and upbraid foolishness. For this he was accused of uncourteousness, and uncharitableness. But those of us who had known him closely can vouch for his having been most exemplary in his show of courtesy to friend and foe, young and old alike, as well as in his respect for fairplay and justice. A.A. Milne once quipped: "The third-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the majority. The second-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the minority. The first rate mind is only happy when it is thinking". Periyar's was a first-rate mind, a perfectly just and sound mind, a well-cultivated mind given to original thinking.

When firmness of purpose is yoked to a reasoning mind, it enables one to regard difficulties as but evils to be surmounted, no matter what shape they may assume. It was so with Periyar and what was more, it constituted one of the steel-like sinews of his character, one of the best instruments of his success.

Eloquent Expounder of Criticism

Writing and speaking, speaking and writing- this ceaseless twin activity formed the elixir of Periyar's life. Without this he would hardly have cared to live long. But then, was he writing copiously and speaking tirelessly just to amuse himself? No. On the contrary he deemed it as the grand mission of his life to carry the message of reason and truth through his writings and speeches to the remotest - corners of our land and redeem the people from a life of mute suffering and abject surrender to the despotism of out-dated customs and truncated traditions. To Periyar Manu is the arch villain of the piece. When the latter says that immemorial custom is transcendent law, does he not sound ridiculous in the present age of scientific and technlogical explosion and assertion of fundamental human rights? Flinging himself into the cause of liberty and justice, Periyar scalded his foes with biting sarcasm and pungent irony. The hammerstrokes of his extraordinary -common sense were dreaded by the high priests of orthodoxy and traditionalism. His wit and wisdom made even his most carping slanderers pause and think whether there was not some substration of truth in what he propounded.

The clear conception, the inexorable logic, the high purpose, the dauntless spirit-the firm resolve, this is eloquence. Judged by this yardstick, Periyar was uniquely eloquent, with a racy and breezy style of his own which kept millions of his hearers intellectually enriched and emotionally refreshed for hours together. He was an enchanting conversationalist and could as well be called the "Fiery Particle" because his physical frame held such ferocious vitality.

Bringer of Hope to Millions:

A man of multifacted genius Periyar became a legend during his life time and undoubtedly will continue to be so in times to come. One of the most outstanding figures in the history of our State, he must be considered the most notable independent spirit of modern times. He has attained immortality as the magnificent messiah who brought hope to millions of his compatriots by shattering the rusty fetters of social and economic thraldom that had been imposed on them by caste - hierarchy, priestly ritualism, and religious dogmatism. He identified the human areas, felt sincerely, thought creatively, spoke fervently, wrote critically and acted practically. He pooled his resources vibrantly and spent them prudently in the service of the people. Sick of competitive politics and negative controversies, he spearheaded an agitation for marshalling the conscience of the state to remould its laws and social structure. We are reaping today the harvest of his worthy labours, to some extent. However the historic war for total emancipation he had initiated is yet to be won completely. But the spirit of Periyar the grand patriarch of our times, a man of the masses, a giant among pigmies, will, it is hoped and continue to inspire us as an untailing beacon of light to win the war ultimately—the war against ignorance and indigence unjustice and ineptness, fraud and falsehood, irrationality and intolerance.

PERIYAR DISTRICT

The new Periyar district will come into effect on and from September 17.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has announced that Coimbatore district would be bifurcated into two districts—Coimbatore district and Periyar district.

Six taluks of Erode, Dharapuram, Bhavani, Gobi Chettipalayam, Satyamangalam and Perundurai will constitute the Periyar district. Erode will be the headquarters of the district.

With the formation of Periyar district there will be now 16 districts in the State.

The district will be inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru M. G. Ramachandran.

The Grand Rebel of Tamilnadu

—By Dr. K.R. Hanumanthan,
Professor of Ancient History
School of Historical Studies
Madurai Kamaraj University,

It is said that ordinary men follow others while geniuses make others to follow them. Conformity to existing traditions and customs is not the way of greatmen. They rebel against the common trends, carve out new paths and attract the masses towards them. Periyar E.V.R. was one of those rare geniuses in whom the spirit of rebellion was in-born. He rebelled, and rebelled grandly against the existing Tamil society, its norms and values, its culture and way of life in the political social and cultural fields. As Toynbee the great historian said he was one of those creative individuals who were bold enough to cut the "Cake of Custom" and show a new path to the masses.

Family rebel:

Even as a young lad, Periyar displayed a remarkable spirit of rebellion against orthodoxy, in his own family. "Much to the dislike and irritation of the orthodox, he was seen touching the untouchables he was seen delighting himself in drinking water and eating food" with them. He insisted on eating non-vegetarian food on prohibited days. He prevented his wife and other members of his family from visiting the temples. Often he brought the untouchables to be fed in his house. His unorthodoxy reached its climax when he removed the "Thali" the symbol of marriage from the neck of his wife, after calling it as the symbol of slavery. His parents were aghast at this sacreliege and poured abuses on him to such an extent that he left the house and went to Banaras.

Party rebel:

His spurt of rebellion, next exhibited itself in the Congress Party in which he was a member and later on the secretary of its local organ. He condemned the practice of serving food in separate places for Brahmins and Non-Brahmins in the Gurukulam at Shermadevi, run by V.V.S. Iyer. As the secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress Party he refused to pay the donation sanctioned by the Congress to the Gurukulam which was supposed to train young men in the spirit of patriotism and social service. He urged for common mess for all the inmates of the "ashram" ,and waged a crusade against communal discrimination. As a result of his vigilant propaganda the Gurukulam lost its public patronage and slowly died away.

In order to bring about social justice, Periyar insisted on the reservation of seats for the Non-Brahmin Communities in the legislature and public services. He proposed his idea in the form of a resolution in the Tirunelveli convention of the Congress in 1920. But it was brushed aside by the Chairman S. Srinivasa Iyengar who styled it as "detrimental to national unity". Year after year Periyar brought the resolution in the Congres but could not pass it. Disgusted with the Congress which according to him sheltered and nurtured communalism he left the Party in 1925 and became a fighter for social freedom and justice.

Social and religious rebel:

The Gurukulam affair and the bitter experiences he had in the Congress, convinced him of the necessity of fighting against the social evils especially the Varnashrama system which gave the Brahmin a supreme position in society . He thought that he could do it within the Congress. But when he found even Gandhiji supporting the idea of Varnashrama he thought that he could fight out the evil only from outside the Congress. He started the self respect movement and urged the Non-Brahmins to come out of the Hindu fold in which they were given the last rank as Sudras and Panchamas. He asked them whether they were not ashamed of employing the Brahmin priests who dubbed them as sudras meaning children of concubines. Since Brahmanic religion and religious texts such as Dharma Sastras were the root causes for the perpetuation of the varna system he began attacking the Hindu religion itself. He wanted the removal of Brahminic Hinduism lock, stock and barrel from the Tamil Society, if any one wanted to eradicate casteism and untochability from it. Therefore he launched a scathing attack on Hindu Gods, customs, rites and ceremonies in a manner unparallalled in Indian History. He became a rationalist and asked the Tamils to use their reason and not to believe what the priests and puranas said.

Hindu Gods and ceremonies could not stand the test of his pure reason piercing logic and scathing criticism.

Like Voltaire of France he abhorred the tyranny of organized religion, and adopted the slogan "Crush the infamous thing-religion" He joined with Voltaire in condemning the selfish priest as "the first divine was the first rogue who met first fool. "Like Diderot he branded all institutionalized religions as instruments of exploitation, devised by the scoundrels to enable them to prey upon the ignorant masses. His teachings were inconfirmity with the rationalism and liberalism of Diderot and other enlightened scholars of the west who maintained that "men will never be free till the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest". Yes, Periyar was not only against organized religious tyranny but also - political tyranny. He agreed with d' Alembert who declared that the only assurance of progress lay in universal enlightenment which he termed as Pahutharivu in Tamil. He named his movement as enlightenment movement or "Pahutharivu Iyakkam" "What is the use of religion and God" he asked if it is not for the maintenance of equality among men and perpetuate squalor and misery among the illiterate masses".

After denouncing organized religion as an obstruction to all Progress, he began to condemn the practice of meaningless rites and ceremonies, beliefs and superstitions. He was particularly against the practice of the Tamilians looking into the almanac and finding out auspicious moments to start good activities and inauspicious times in which no good act should be performed. When a house is on fire during ragukalam should one stop putting it out? When one's life is in danger would he stop going to the doctor during Yamakandam? Will a businessman refuse to board a train or a ship if it starts during Rahukalam? It is all absurd he said and deplored the enormous waste of time and lost opportunities of the Tamils because of this superstition. Therefore he asked his followers, to perform marriages and other important acts during inauspicious periods such as Rahukalam, Kuligai Kalam and Yamakandam.

He also condemned the practice of matching young men and women according to their horoscopes. Many a happy marriage has been wrecked on the rocks of horoscopes. Are there not more widows among educated Brahmins who perform marriages by looking into horoscopes than among the illiterate poor people who do not bother about them he used to ask. He told the people to consult the doctor before matching young people rather than the astrologer.

Belief in ill omens, was another cause for the backwardness of the Tamil people. He was sore over people who return home after having seen a widow, a single Brahmin, oil presser or a cat crossing his path. He also exhorted people not to believe in the bad effects which could be produced by the howling of dogs or Jackals, chattering of lizards, hooting of owls, sneezing of a male and the good effects which could be produced by the braying of a donkey or the cawing of a crow. He was also totally against the Tamilians' belief in miracles, which could be performed by God-men and Mantravadhis (magicians). He ridiculed those who were afraid of certain so called bad numbers such as three, eight, thirteen and eighteen. He particularly wanted the young generation not to believe in all these superstitions. He deplored the B.Sc. graduates who took bath during eclipses and performed the Sraddha ceremonies to propitiate the spirits of their dead ancestors. He wanted them not to believe in things which are not explicable by reason. He declared that whatever is beyond the perception of the five Indriyas (sense organs) is untrue and irrational.

Nothing worried him more than the inhuman treatment meted out to women in the Society. Again religion was responsible for the degradation of women in the family. According to Shastras Women are equal to Sudras who can not study religious scriptures and perform sacrifices. They can not perform the Sraddha ceremony for their dead parents. Therefore the orthodox people abhorred the birth of female children. Periyar categorically condemned the literature which advocated the treating of women as slaves of men. That was the reason why he condemned the practice of tying a tali around the neck of the bride. When it was pointed out that it was a symbol to proclaim to the public the married status of a lady he asked why not men also wear a tali around their necks to show that they are married. His heart ached when he found the enormous waste of human energy found in females, who were not used in the society for higher services and kept idle in houses as mere cooks and servant maids. He asked women not to wear colourful sarees and ornaments just to please the men who considered them as mere objects of sensual pleasure and procreating machines. He wanted them to wear male dress, and compete with men in all walks of life. He ridiculed the selfish males who worshipped goddesses in temples but treated their own wives as worse than slaves in their homes. He wanted to make a bonfire of all puranic literature which praised the absolute servility of woman to man. He also abhorred the Hindu ideal of chastity of women. If chastity is a virtue for women, it should be equally applicable to men also But men are rarely chaste and true to their wives. In such cases women should be enabled to divorce easily, their unfaithful husbands. He was all in favour of the remarriage of widows and even divorcees.

Periar was equally bitter in his condemnation of the practice of untouchability in the Hindu society. He wished that a society perpetrating untouchability may rather perish than survive with it. It was all due to the superstition that some people are born pure and some others are born-impure and are capable of polluting the others. It was his zeal for the eradication of untouchability, which made him to take the untouchables into a temple at Erode and fight for their freedom in the Vaikkam satygraha. According to Periar scriptural literature such as Manudharma Shastra which advocate social inequality and practice of untouchability must be burnt publicy and should not be followed by any one.

What is the solution for the twin evils of Hindu society, casteism and untouchability? Periar is of the view that reform is no solution. Buddha, Sri Ramanuja and many other leaders tried to reform the Hindu society but in vain. Therefore a social revolution is the only panacea for all the evils of Hindu society. How can such a revolution be brought about? It is possible only by a rational and benevolent dictatorship. Like Sunyatsen of

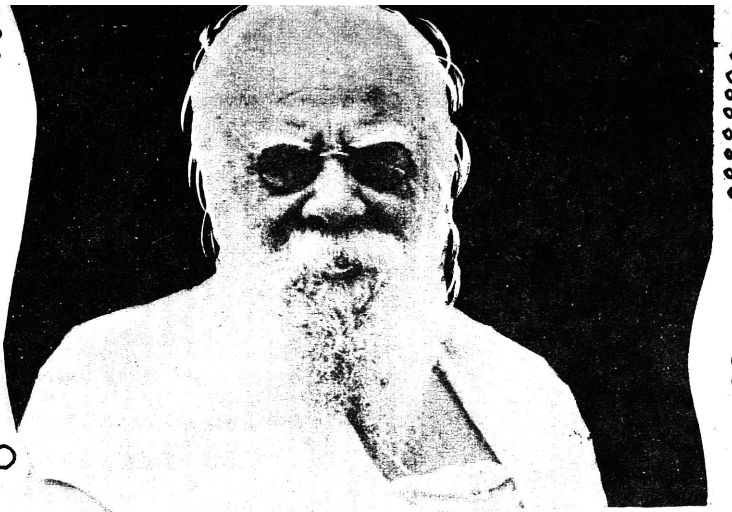
China, Kemal Pasha of Turkey and Peter the great of Russia, only a dictator can bring about a social revolution in India by stringent laws. But social justice could be established in India also in a democratic set up, if the various castes are given representation in the legislature and public services according to their numerical strength. Such a representation would graduaually raise the economic and social status of the backward castes and make them equal to the so called high castes. Such a state of affairs would ultimately lead to castleessness according to him. The caste people also must sacrifice a little for the uplift of the backward castes. According to Periar they should deny themselves the privilege of entering the colleges and technical schools for 15 years. Of course this is a drastic step which no high caste Hindu would be prepared to take up.

Political rebel:

Periyar proved himself to be a rebel in the political field also. He condemned outright the system of Government called democracy. According to him it is unfit for a country like ours, where the majority of the people are illiterate and whose votes could be easily purchased. Virtues like honesty, uprighteousness, keeping one's promises, can never be practiced in a democracy. It teaches man how to cheat people by false promises and dishonesty. Further democracy counts heads but not the grey matter inside it. It leads to the rule of mediocracy rather than aristocracy. He was convinced that the modern democratic elections are the sources of all evils, such as bribery, horse-trading and political chicanery. Therefore he asked his party men not to stand for elections and enter legislatures. According to him, only vested interests are benefitted in modern democracies. Toynbee once said that Democracy and Industrialism are two evils of Modern Civilization. Periar also held a similar view. It is to be remembered, that Voltaire, the great rationalist, was also dead against democracy. Though Periar did not spell out the nature of Government he favoured, it may be inferred that he preferred an intellectual aristocracy of a few to the ignorant democracy of the many.

Periar for a long time toyed with the idea of establishing a vein. But such ideas were all dubbed as antinational capable of encouraging fissiparous tendencies and therefore banned. Periar had to drop his idea of establishing a separate Dravidiasthan in the south. Moreover his idea did not find Dravidian Federation consisting of all the Dravidian speaking areas of the south. He of course denied the existence of distinct races such as Aryan and Dravidian. But he declared that one could not shut his eyes to the glaring differences between the two streams of culture Aryan and Dravidian as revealed from the Sanskritic and Dravidian literature. The Aryan culture glorified other worldliness and negative approach to life while the Dravidian culture emphasized the enjoyment of earthly pleasures and a positive approach to life. Arignar Anna also spoke and wrote in a similar favour with the other Dravidian States of the South.

Thus Periar bristled with novel and revolutionary ideas in the political, social and cultural fields. He wanted to transform the Tamil society completely by translating such ideas in practice. He knew that he was attempting the impossible but was satisfied that the seeds of rationalism had been sown in the minds of Tamil people, which would germinate someday or other and grow into a tree bearing sweet fruits. He preached humanity in the place of divinity, equality in the place of gross inequality based on caste system, rank materialism in the place of spiritualism and rationalism in the place of blind sentimentalism. In more than one way he proved to be an institution by himself, occupying a venerable place among the rationalistic liberals of the world.



The Militant Atheist

Dr. SAALAI ILANTHIRAIAN
(University of Delhi)

PERIYAAR E. V. Raamasaamy, who is very aptly called the " LION OF ERODE " was the life force behind the activity in almost all spheres of life in Tamilnaadu for the past sixty years. His thunderous roar echoed in each and every field of activity. Not a single aspect of modern society and its movements missed his attention. Anyone who just takes a cursory look at his long life of hectic activity will at once jump to the conclusion that Periyaar was an all-rounder who could deal with anything that affected the life pattern of the people. And therefore, it is not an easy job to identify him with a particular movement or organisation. Yet, if one takes a close look at the root and source of his multifarious activities he would not find it very difficult to call him the " Militant Atheist " of our times.

The Difference

For the common man Periyaar was a politician ; as for as he could see, Periyaar was with this party or that party at the time of elections. And, curiously enough, for a long time ; the party that was supported by the Periyaar was easily the winner at the polls. But, again no common man was as prudent as to know that Periyaar was a politician with a difference. The fact, that Periyaar was a " non-politician " among the politicians of his times is clearly borne out by another fact that he never aspired for a position in the Government.

The so called social reformers, claimed him as the " Class-1 social reformer" of the twentieth centuary But they never knew that Periyaar himself has disowned this " title ". He once declared that he did not belong to that group of individuals who claimed to be social reformers. While explaining his stand he said, " when there is perfection in many aspects of life and only a few spheres need some change or face-lift we can call it reform ; but, our society needs a complete overhauling which can be done only through a revolution."

A handful of well to do people who were self styled saviours of the poor and downtrodden were pleased to call him the " Champion of the depressed and downtrodden." No doubt, he was one and he was a valiant champion too ; but they never knew that the Periyaar was not their collegue and friend who just wanted to protect and keep the poor and downtrodden as a separate entity in the society. He fought to redeem the poor from the clutches of the socio-religious-villainy and to re-instate them in par with the others in the society. Yes ; Periyaar was not a mere humanist ; he was the warrior friend of the downtrodden. And that is why the so called social reformers could not relish or digest Periyaar's tirade against the age-old social system.

And for some others Periyar was the Socrates of modern Indiain. The power of his thoughts, the disipline on which they had been moulden and the refreshinghly new idiomsin which they were expressed were all original and original to the core. And naturally anyone will easily be tempted to compare him with the ancient greek thinker. But, in their very sweet and heartening thought they tend to forget that Socrates was not a tireless fighter like Periyaar. Periyaar was not satisfied with just expressing his views; he carried them to the common people through his pen and his tongue and through agitations wherever found necessary.

Why destruction ?

We can also campare and contrast Periyaar with many other people who identity themselves with one or the other of the social activities. In all these, he stands apart as a " public man " with a conspicuous difference. This difference and this difference alone makes him " Periyaar " or the great one.

Everyone knows that our society is not an ideal one and that this state of affairs has continued for

centuries together. They also feel that this society should be completely changed. But the public men throughout the long history of this (Tamil-Indian) society could not find out the root cause for all the social evils that have thrieved on the ignorance and indulgence of the people. Or, they did not rather had the courage to raise their finger against the real culprit. That means none of them had a clear comprehensive view of their society while they prescribed the ways and means for its reform.

As some one has clearly pointed out the "substructure and superstructure" of this (Indian/Tamil) society have, in the long run, assumed entirely different roles which in turn made the understanding of the socio-economic problems highly, complicated :

"The Substructure of a society is predominantly determined by the forces of production and the relations of production ; the former establishes the man-material relationship which in turn shapes the latter, namely, human and social relationships. The superstructure, consisting of religion, morals, ethics, laws, customs, conventions, politics etc. are directly or indirectly shaped and determined by the substructure. But there have been instances in different societies at different times in their historical evolution when the superstructure itself begins to shape and determine the substructure.

"When the superstructure begins to dominate the substructure, not only man loses control over his environment and his own creations but fails even to grasp what goes on around him as well as within himself. He is no more the master of his own destiny. What he has once created as customs, conventions, religious principles, ethics and morality, for social utility and purpose have lost their original purpose and significance. Over a period of time these elements of superstructure get themselves established, crystalized institutionalized and ritualized; they became self-generating, self-perpetuating, meaningless but most powerful and independent entities; they grow monstrously into an end in themselves. Vested interests develop, within these entities; they vested interests conveniently convert them into 'socially approved and sanctioned' instruments of exploitation; oppression, discrimination, social stratification and injustice. Man, instead of being an end in himself becomes a means to all other ends."

This, in essence, is the history of the development of our society. Unless and otherwise one endeavours to set right the confusion in the relationship between the super structure and substructure he cannot dream of creating a society wherein 'each one will work according to his ability and enjoy according to his needs.'

When Periyaar clearly understood this particular situation in respect of the socio-economic problems he started attacking the priestly class and the belief in god they were perpetuating among the people. He was fully convinced that as long as the belief in god existed among the people no reform could be effected in their life pattern.

In Periyaar's own words, 'caste is a curse which must be abolished; to abolish caste religion must be abolished ; and to abolish religion God must be abolished". This statement is nothing but the result of a clear understanding of the centuries old social system that has been imposed on the people in the name of religion and God.

It is only on the basis of this understanding that Periyaar declared "There is no God, no God; no God. He who invented God is a fool; he who preaches God is a rogue ; he who worships God is a barbarian." As far as Periyaar was concerned this was not a mere slogan to attract the attention of the people. He took this message to every nook and corner of Tamilnadu. He never hesitated to demonstrate that there is no truth in the stories about the socalled Gods and Goddesses. He burnt te pictures of these Gods (deities of the Hindu Pantheon) in public; he broke the images of these Gods in public places. He did all these just to impress upon the common people that all the stories about God and his powers were untrue and that they have no significance in the human life.

Periyaar was a man of strong convictions. He never uttered a single words which he did not himself put into practice. He openly announced and asserted, "Blind

belief and bland faith cannot be eradicated by reformatory work, but they can be done away with only by destructive work." He went on to explain that the cause of untouchability is not political slavery ; it is the Hindu religion pure and simple. Social reformers have perforce to kill the demon of untouchability, if necessary by killing the Hindu religion itself !

We have had a number of social and religious reformers throughout our long history. But, we should realise that none of them was able to eradicate either poverty or untouchability. We had humanitarians like Valluvar, Thaayumaanavar and Vallalaar etc., their utterances also were widely publicised. The vehemence with which the Siddhar poets attacked the caste system and religious rituals was a class by itself. Yet, that could not shake even a single brick at the foundation of both these evils. It should not be very difficult for any one to understand that their weakness lies in their belief in God. As long as one has belief in God he can only talk of superficial reforms that will not last long. And only when he removes the root cause, which in this case is the belief in the existence of a God, he will be able to extricate the people from the tyranny of these age old evils.

Periyaar could very easily understand the main plank on which these evils stand. And he immediately launched his mission on a warfooting against those strong holds that protected these social evils. The following statement which breathes a cent percent " Periyaariyan Spirit " will show what Periyaar actually stood for : " If we actually want to do anything worthwhile, we should be prepared to make a bonfire of all our Gods, our religion, our sastras, our epics and puranas. I say this because all the Gods we have are the protectors of caste-system; all of them have murdered those who stood for a casteless society."

In a society where religion has been given the most prestigious place it is not an easy joke to speak or do anything against it. But, Periyaar, being an iron hearted warrior taking up the cause of the downtrodden preferred to do that. By taking this mission upon himself he proved to be worthy of his own statement that runs like this : " Those engaged in this destructive work should have a magnanimous steadfastness and a clear mind without the smallest doubt and with the biggest venture to bear insults and to court death."

With such a devotion to his philosophy Periyaar started his tirade against religion and God the root cause of all evils in the society. By doing so he wanted to instil a kind of courage and awakening in the minds of the people. Only when the poor and downtrodden realise that their belief in God and the resultant aith in all sorts of superstitions are shattered they will be able to fight their real enemy. And to develop such a state of mind they should cultivate an apathy for God and religion. This is what Periyaar wanted to create. And hence, he vehemently denied the existence of God and became the first formost atheist with a militant bent of mind.

The Success

Periyaar's mission was, no doubt, a very difficult one ; but, at the same time, there is no denying of the fact that mission achieved its goal to a considerable extent. As Dr. C. N. Annaadurai has put it, " the battle fields Periyaar saw are many and the victories he won are many." This statement by one of his closest disciples can be appended with what the Periyaar thought at the fag end of his life (at the age of 94) about his life's mission. " In my life time I have been thinking, telling, propagating and practising what were considered by the majority of others as unthinkable, unutterable and impracticable in the field of religion.

Due to this posture of mind, I have never experienced in these 93 years of my life time any defect, trouble, inconvenience or mental dissatisfaction. On the contrary, I have achieved very easily honours which are considered to be impossible to achieve by others. The country and the people especially the backward and depressed classes have seen the growth and development."

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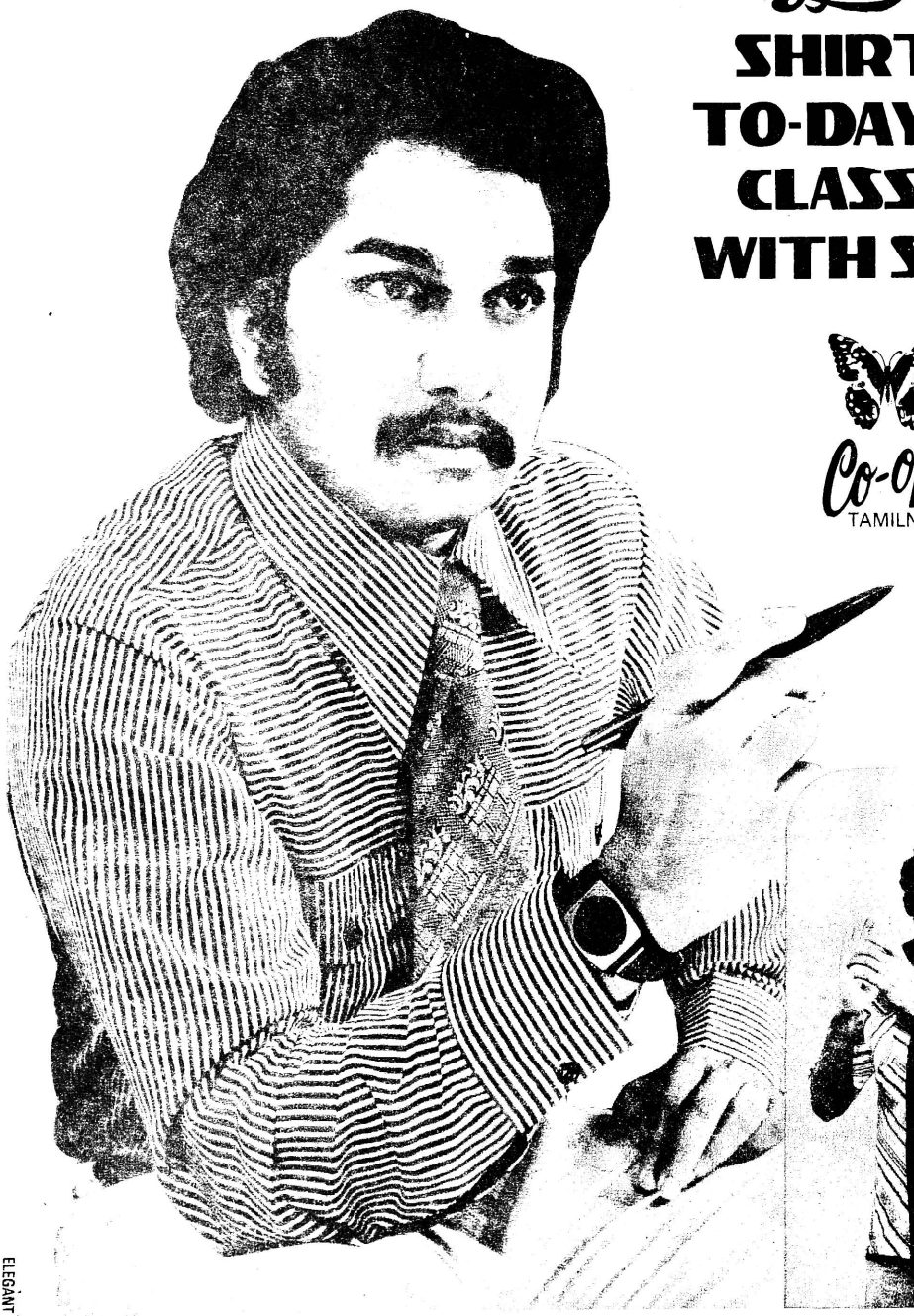

ELEGANT

A Unique Personality

C. R. NARASIMHAN

Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy was a unique personality. He was more or less of the same age as my father Rajaji. They became friends and co-workers when both of them were in their 40's. This friendship was based on common purpose over social and political issues. Both belived in the elimination of the drink evil. Both were against outworn social and caste restrictions. Both were for the programme of non-co-operation against foreign rule. They worked together closely though in individual up-bringing they were totally different from one another. In this period they were bound together.

When in 1920, I was a boy of eleven, Thiru Naicker as he was then popularly called, once putting me affectionately on his lap enquired why I was thin and weak. He made detailed enquiries as to what and how much I ate daily and about my daily routine. He got the impression that I was a kind of neglected type owing to pre-occupations of my father. To him I bore the marks of a person who was growing up without the care of a loving mother. Thiru Naicker's face showed his anguish about it. It also showed his admiration of my father whose entire thought was about the country's problems leaving him very little time for the family. Even as a boy I could see these feelings gleaning through Thiru Naicker's sympathetic face.

In 1927 when the Tiruchengodu Gandhi Ashram was founded and which is continuing to do useful work for the last fifty-three years, Thiru Naicker presided over the inaugural function.

By this time the non-cooperation programme of Gandhiji stood withdrawn. The tempo of that movement had held different types of people together. A kind of reaction set in when the movement was withdrawn. Those who believed that Swaraj would dawn in a year were disillusioned and frustrated. In the North, the Ali brothers who were Gandhiji's strong supporters drifted away. In the same manner, Thiru Naicker also drifted away. He started the self-respect movement and propagated new theories. Though this separated Periyar and Rajaji and put them in opposite camps, there did exist kind of rapport between tham. Their viewpoints occasionally met as extremes do. It is well known that Periyar prior to his marriage with Mani Ammai consulted Rajaji about the matter.

Even though Periyar's speeches fumed against Rajaji's policies, whenever they met, great matual consideration was shown.

Periyar's anguish was great when my father was in his death bed. Periyar was present throughout the cremation ceremony and sympathised with the families' bereavement. His tribute to Rajaji at that time is of historic value. It was really revealing to see two opponents respecting one another.

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After half a century meeting Recalled

(*By 'Thamizharingar'* A.RANGANATHAN)

A first meeting with Mr. Ramasamy Naicker and Mr. C. N. Annadurai took place in 1930, in the Theagaraya Buildings in Mount Road which accommodated the offices of the "Justice" daily and "Dravidan", the Tamil daily of the Justice Party. I was then working as Editor of 'Dravidan'. One day while I was in my room correcting final proofs and writing the editorial for the day, the room peon told me that a man with long beard along with an young man were waiting to see the Editor of 'Dravidan'. On being asked to admit them in, I saw those two persons at a short distance. The gentleman in the beard aged about 35 years was looking a little surprised and asked whether I was the Editor of 'Dravidan'.

I could easily understand his misgivings and surprise, because I was only 22 years old, fresh from college. When I confirmed my identity, the man with beard introduced himself as Erode Ramasamy Naicker and said his companion was Mr. C.N.Annadurai, M.A. Mr. Naicker was so pleased that an young non-brahmin could be the editor of a daily newspaper and shook my hands heartily.

All the while Mr. Annadurai looked calm and collected with a mild smile. I told Mr. Naicker that I was pleased to meet him as the leader and founder of the Self-respect movement, the main objective of which was to campaign for the removal of religious superstitions.

As our conversation proceded lively, Mr.Naicker illustrated his campaign against religious superstitions by a vivid example. His example is still as green in my memory as his mode of presenting his favorite subject for which he lived for 95 years and died. Here I give below the English translation of his narration, as far as my memory recalls after the lapse of 50 years. The facts and incidents disclosed here are substantively correct to my recollection Mr. Naicker said: with *glooming* eyes; "you know in your city of Madras there is a well-known Easwaran temple at Puasawalkam by the name of .....I happened to be in a friend's house at the time of what is called as Bramotsavam which draws a lot of so-called Bhakthas. That morning the idols of Iswara was taken out in procession in the street. Along side this idol, the idol of his consort Iswari Amman was also seen. At one stage, the Amman's idol was hurriedly withdrawn from the presence of Iswara and whisked away to a place distant from Iswara. In the place of the lawfully wedded Iswari was found by the side of Iswara, the idol of a courtesan woman, bedecked with all ornaments and looking glamourous.

"When I asked the significance of Itheekam of this theatrical incident, it was explained that Iswara fell in love with a glamourous looking courtesan, On finding that God Iswara's attention was diverted from her Iswari got wild with fury and as a protest against this wrong done to her she ran away from him ,not desiring to be near her unfaithful husband.

"A little later, Iswara's idol was taken to the irrate wife, to whom Iswara appologised for his action and thereafter the idol of the disappointed courtesan, who shared Iswara's love for a short time only, was withdrawn from the scene and the idols of Iswara and Iswari went side by side to the sanctum sanctorum of the temple"

I was listening almost dumfounded to the harrowing tale, while Mr. Naciker was stirred emotionally.

Mr. Naicker continued his story with unabated satire and anger.

"I think, young editor, comment on this disgraceful episode regarding Iswara's sense of morality is needless .If you have any doubt, please witness the Brahmatsavam of the shrine at Purasawalkam this year."

(I may say here that my visit to this festival later on confirmed Mr. Naicker's incident)

Mr.Naicker went on: your see that while the existence of God itself is a matter of opinion, men has disgraced Him by attributing to Him, all the vices of which man is guilty. If the supreme God is discredited with a concubine and made public exhibition of it, which reasonable human being will degrade himself by worshipping Him?"

Mr.Annadurai intervened: It is against such atrocious religious superstitions that the self respect movement is crusading amidst the opposition of uneducated people. Our campaign is not so much against the existance of God as such as against the plethora of religious superstitions, which are paraded for the belief of men"

Addressing Mr.Naciker I said: "we are one with you in your relentless campaign against the stupid religious superstition surrounding God & Puranas. But what is the significance of your campaign against Kamba Ramayana, the Magnum opus of Poet Kambar?

Mr. Naicker said, "I am glad you have raised the question. Our campaign against Kamba Rama yana is only with the characterisation of Rama, Sita, Ravana and Kumbakarna. It was a time honoured convention with Asura in ancient Tamil Nadu to abduct the enemy king's wife or wives and courtesan and imprison them in the invading king's countries as hostages. If a particular king is vanquished in the war, their women will be retained by the conqueror. Bereft of all side issues, Ravana took Sita as a hostage before declaring war with Rama. I cannot understand why his simple and common incident is exagerated and a lot of nonsense is woven around it. In the conduct of Ravana, a Dravidian king, one admirable quality is stressed both by Kambar and Valmiki that the Asura King never chose to touch Sita while she was completely under his mercy.

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Board up glass windows or put storm shutters in place. Use good wooden planks securely fastened. Make shift boarding may do more manage then none at all. Provide strong suitable support for outside doors.

If you do not have wooden boards handy, paste paper strips on glasses to prevent splinters flying into the house.

Get extra food especially things which can be eaten without cooking or with very little preparation. Store extra drinking water in suitable covered vessels.

If you are in one of the evacuation areas, move your valuable articles to upper floors to minimise flood damage.

Have hurricane latern, flash lights and or other emergency lights in working condition and keep them handy.

Check on everything that might blow away or be torn loose. Kerosene tins, cans, agricultural implements, garden tools, road signs and other objects become weapons of destruction in strong winds. Remove them and store them in a covered room.

Be sure that a window or door can be opened on the lee side of the house i.e., the side opposite the one facing the wind.

Make provision for children and adults requiring special diets.

Remove cattle to safe places as far as possible.

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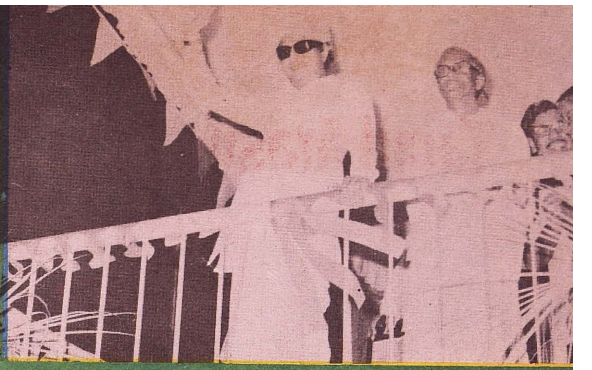

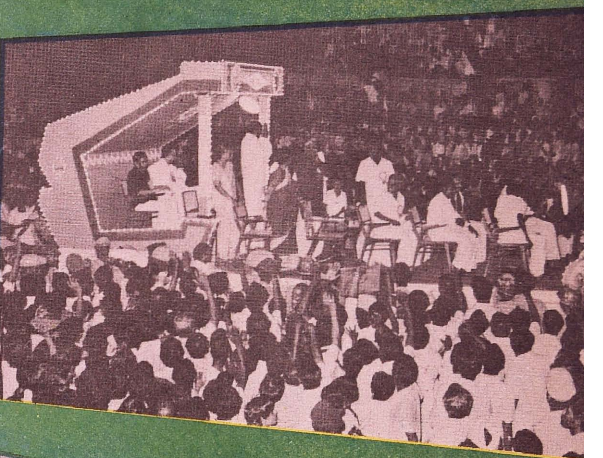

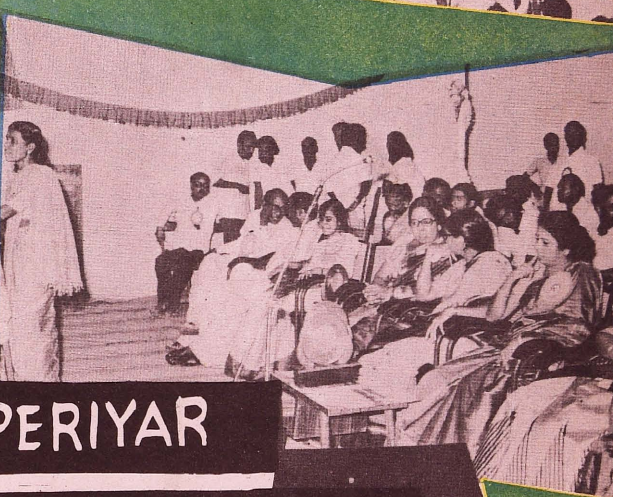

THANTHAI PERIYAR

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

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AUGUST 25, 26 - 1979

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